

P E T R A R C H

T O

L A U R A,

A P O E T I C A L E P I S T L E.

By Mr. C. J A M E S.

K

TU FACIS HOC, OCULIQUE TUI; QUIBUS IGNEA CEDUNT
SYDERA; QUI FLAMMÆ CAUSA FUERE MEÆ.

Ovidii Epist. Heroidum.

L O N D O N:

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DEDICATION.

A Celle qui se reconnoitra.

TO LADY *****.

ENDOWED, as your Ladyship is, with the amiable qualities which deservedly rendered Laura an ornament to the fourteenth century, and like her less distinguished for the external charms of a beautiful form, than your unblemished purity of mind, I know no one, beneath whose eyes this feeble sketch of Petrarch's attachment can so properly be laid, as those, which, if Petrarch now lived, might produce the same effects. For in whatever light the world beholds you---whether in the mild sunshine of domestic happiness, or in the public walk of fashionable life, breathing benevolence and social kindness---the natural serenity of your looks enlivens every scene; your beauty still attracts admiring crowds, while veneration bends to an acknowledged innocence of manners.

PERMIT me to withdraw, without apologizing for the liberty I have taken, in thus dedicating to your Ladyship the hasty production of a few mornings. I have trusted to that uncommon condescension, and mildness of disposition, which to superior acquirements, has joined all the simplicity of Laura. I shall add, as the sincerest testimony of my respect for virtue, a devout wish, that you may long remain among us, attended by every comfort of the marriage state ; and when you shall be called to your native heaven, that you may still continue to live in the spotless conduct of your fair descendants.

I have the honor to be,

My Lady,

Your Ladyship's

Most obedient, and

Most humble Servant,

CHARLES JAMES.

P R E F A C E.

AS I am prepared to hear a variety of opinions respecting the morality of this Epistle, which from the hurry it was written in, and the unequal abilities of its author, must be liable to many errors—the only answer I shall make, will be, that in consulting human nature I conceive it possible to love as Petrarch did. Far be it from me, however, to encourage a weakness (to give it no other name) which every man in his senses must condemn, and which proved so fatal to that celebrated Poet. For, as the elegant translator of his life observes, ‘ whatever palliations may be
‘ drawn in excuse for Petrarch, who lived in a dark age, under
‘ the clouds of superstition which at that time covered the world;
‘ no apology can be made with justice at present, for those, whose
‘ characters resemble his in this unhappy point of view; since the
‘ light both of sacred and moral truth, now clearly conveyed to
‘ all, rejects all sophistry in respect to the internal disposition, as
‘ well as the outward conduct, and condemns as certainly the in-
‘ ward encouragement of the passion, as the outward commission
‘ of the crime.’

I cannot quit this agreeable and elegant Author, without acknowledging, that I am greatly indebted to the perusal of Petrarch's life for one or two descriptions, and for some thoughts attempted in this poem. At the same time, I must express my surprise that among so many productions which have appeared of late, none should be seen upon a subject, where so very ample a field is opened for descriptive genius to range in. That pen, which in the brightest glow of imagination, could paint the feelings of Louisa's soul, would have found little difficulty in doing justice to the real anguish of Petrarch's heart. For my part, who have in one uninterrupted succession of ideas completed this poetical trifle, I will candidly confess, that I found it more arduous to curb my heated fancy on this occasion, than I have at others to pick out images for the most barren subject. The unbounded attachment which Petrarch, a man of the quickest sensibility and naturally impetuous in his pursuits, felt for the beautiful Laura, and which neither absence, time, nor a consciousness of error could diminish, affords the thinking mind such an exuberance of inward warfare, between a darling foible and a virtuous breast, that like the eye in a crowded parterre of beautiful flowers, we no sooner stop at one feeling, than we are attracted by the gathering importance of another. I shall conclude this observation with an extract from the life of Petrarch, which will justify the warmth expressed in one part of the Poem. Writing to a friend at Avignon he gives the following account of his agitated mind :

‘ I have

‘ I have not time to inform you of my sufferings in the city
 ‘ you are in; perceiving that the only means of recovering my
 ‘ health was to leave it, I took this step, notwithstanding all the
 ‘ efforts of my friends to retain me. Alas! their friendship serves
 ‘ only to my destruction. I came into this solitude (Vaucluse)
 ‘ to seek a shelter from the tempest; and to live a little for myself,
 ‘ before I was called to die. I was near the mark I aimed at;
 ‘ I felt with extreme joy my mind was more at ease; the life
 ‘ which I led, seemed to approach to that of the blessed in hea-
 ‘ ven. But behold the force of habit and passion; I return often,
 ‘ though led by no business, into that odious city. I cast myself
 ‘ into the nets in which I was before ensnared. I know not what
 ‘ wind drives me from the port into that stormy sea, where I have
 ‘ been so often shipwrecked. I am no sooner there than I feel
 ‘ I am in a vessel, tossed on every side. I see the firmament on fire,
 ‘ the sea rage, and rocks ready to dash me in pieces. Death pre-
 ‘ sents itself to my eyes; and what is worse than death, I am
 ‘ weary of my present life, and dread that which is to come.’

I must finally observe in vindication of the whole of this trifle,
 against every surmise of plagiarism, that I am not conscious of
 having borrowed a single expression from any poet. Should a
 similitude be found, either in sentiment or word, I can safely say
 it came unlooked for. ‘ Milton,’ as the late Dr. Johnson has re-
 marked, ‘ did not refuse admission to the thoughts, or images of
 ‘ his predecessors, although he did not seek them.’ ‘ If it be im-
 ‘ possible,’ according to the same writer, ‘ for an author of our age to

‘ describe the various pleasures of a rural life, without transmitting
 ‘ the same images, almost in the same combination from one to ano-
 ‘ ther,’ we may with equal certainty conclude, that it is impossible
 to trace man through all the intricacies of his nature, without
 touching at some point where others have been before.

A R G U M E N T.

Petrarch and Laura were both descended from noble families, who held the first employments in their respective countries. Family misfortunes and the translation of the Apostolic see to Avignon by a Pope of French extraction, first brought Petrarch from Italy into France. Having at Avignon acquired the accomplishments requisite for a young man who had his fortune to make in the higher stations of life, he fixed his residence in that city, the seat of literature and of arts. It was there he accidentally met the celebrated Laura at the entrance of a monastery, dedicated to St. Claire. This happened in the twenty-third year of his age. He was according to the memoirs published of his life, ‘ so distinguished in his figure as to attract universal admiration. He
 ‘ appears in his portraits,’ continues the same author, with large
 ‘ and manly features, eyes full of fire, a blooming complexion,
 ‘ and a countenance that bespoke all the genius and fancy which
 ‘ shone forth in his works. He possessed an understanding active
 ‘ and penetrating; a brilliant wit, and a fine imagination. His heart
 ‘ was

‘ was candid and benevolent, susceptible of the most lively affections, and inspired with the noblest sentiments of liberality.’

SUCH was Petrarch : till his unfortunate attachment to an improper object threw a cloud over the brightest ornament of the fourteenth century. In his retirement at Vacluse, in the neighbourhood of Avignon, he frequently endeavoured to get rid of his illicit passion, to which he as frequently returned with redoubled violence. In the following epistle the author has endeavoured to express the various conflicts of an agitated heart, struggling between alluring passion and triumphant virtue.

Nor will it be supposed he has exceeded the bounds of probability, when it is remembered, according to the account given of him in his memoirs, ‘ That his temper was on some occasions violent, and his passions headstrong and unruly. A warmth of constitution hurried him into irregularities, which were followed with repentance and remorse.’

With respect to Laura, it is incontestibly proved, that at the time Petrarch first saw her she was a married woman, whose husband, Hugues de Sade, held the first offices at Avignon ; and not, as some have been pleased to conjecture, a mistress which the Poet kept at Vacluse. The following account of her person will not, I trust, be deemed superfluous by the courteous reader ; for which I must once more have recourse to a book I have so often visited.

‘ At the time she first met Petrarch, she was dressed in green, and her gown embroidered with violets. Her face, her air, her gait, were something more than mortal. Her person was delicate, her eyes tender and sparkling, and her eye-brows black as ebony. Golden locks,’ (which with the author’s permission, what I have frequently seen in the southern parts of France, were, I presume, of a bright auburn colour) ‘waved over her shoulders whiter than snow; and the ringlets were interwoven by the fingers of love. Her neck was well formed, and her complexion animated by the tints of nature, which art vainly attempts to imitate. When she opened her mouth you perceived the beauty of pearls and the sweetness of roses. She was full of graces. Nothing was so soft as her looks, so modest as her carriage, so touching as the sound of her voice. An air of gaiety and tenderness breathed around her, but so pure and happily tempered, as to inspire every beholder with the sentiments of virtue; for she was chaste as the spangled dew drop of the morn. Such, says Petrarch, was the amiable Laura.’

Her attachment to Petrarch, whose unbounded tenderness and love afforded a poignant contrast to the cool indifference of her husband, was as lively as it is possible for sympathy to be, under the influence of the chastest virtue.

PETRARCH TO LAURA,

A POETICAL EPISTLE.

REMOTE and shielded from those piercing eyes,
Whose soft'ning magic melts me into sighs;
While reason, trembling at resistless charms,
Steals to my heart and guards it from alarms;
Say, shall thy friend—that name at least is mine 5
And heav'n may fure allow it to be thine!—
Say, shall thy friend, thy PETRARCH dare to prove
A kindred impulse of untainted love?
From those dear lips the stern injunction came,
And love must yield to friendship's purer name. 10

Stretch'd on the bier, round which with many'a sigh,
Distress has mus'd and fix'd her streaming eye;
When some lost wretch, by keen remembrance torn,
To death's cold mansions sees her lover borne,
Indulgent pity, with officious art 15
Waits on her grief and soothes her bleeding heart.
And shall my LAURA, gentlest of her kind!
My life's sole pride and mistress of my mind!
Whose blest'd idea's all the rest I know,
My only care and happiness below! 20
Shall she from others wipe the tear of grief,
And PETRARCH only be denied relief?
She! at whose glance each gath'ring sorrow flies,
Hope blooms afresh, and blank affliction dies!
Ah, no! that breast, for softness fram'd alone, 25
Heaves with misfortune pity makes her own.

Smooth as thy bosom, tho' not half so fair!
Serenely bright and like thy virtue clear:
Without one noxious particle of heat,
Health's purest spring and every muse's seat, 30
(For

(For there Boccacé tunes his am'rous lay *,
 And azure nymphs to murm'ring echoes play,)
 Close to my walls, in artless beauty flows,
 A silver stream and courts me to repose.
 Soft are it's banks, adorn'd with many'a flower, 35
 And thickly shaded by the leafy bow'r.
 Emblem of sorrow's melancholy train,
 And far sequester'd from the noisy plain,
 My fav'rite willow waves above the tide
 His pendant boughs, in solitary pride.
 Peaceful he hangs and silently reproves 40
 The boist'rous tumults of the man who loves.
 There too thy † laurel stands the wintry storms,
 And full of thee my raptur'd fancy warms.
 Fix'd in this tranquil solitude at last,
 My wand'rings over and my troubles past! 45

* John de Certaldo, or John Boccacé, the celebrated author of the *Decameron*, &c. was Petrarch's particular friend.— They had 'each the same tastes, and
 ' the same aversions; the same ardent desire of knowledge, frankness, truth of
 ' mind, and tenderness of heart.'

† Petrarch consecrated a favourite laurel tree in his garden at Vauleuse to the
 memory of Laura, and called it by her name.

Here let me learn to form each rising thought
 By those chaste principles thy virtue taught:
 Sooth'd by thy looks and innocently free,
 With calm delight to join thy Lord and thee.

And yet—what means this more than friendship's
 heat?

50

Why starts my reason at the dear deceit?
 Shall then no gentle palliative be found,
 No kind delusion to assuage my wound?
 For ever then, with inward fire oppress'd,
 Must PETRARCH nurse the poison in his breast?

55

In secret wander to the bow'r of bliss,
 And long for charms that never must be his?
 For ever then must fruitless pity prove
 The joyless substitute of mutual love?

How lost! how foreign are it's sounds to me,

60

Whose only comforts are to gaze on thee.
 Still to those looks, dissatisfied, unblest'd,
 My wishes wander and I sigh for rest.

Like

Like the benighted mariner, whose eye,
 Loft in the gloom of a tempestuous sky, 65
 Looks for a guiding star, and sadly steers,
 With doubtful anguish and oppressive fears:
 My troubled soul, tofs'd on the surge of life,
 With keen impatience views the giddy strife
 Of things below ; turns from ambition's plan, 70
 And sick'ning owns the wretchedness of man.

Ill-fated they ! whose souls congenial born,
 Are sway'd by int'rest, prejudice or scorn ;
 In passive servitude, whose moments glide
 Through all the formal miseries of pride : 75
 How curs'd in sick'ning apathy to prove
 The wild excess of ill-requited love.
 Yet thou my LAURA—for to charms like thine
 All nature bends, and sighs at virtue's shrine—
 Ne'er from ungrateful *Sade*, whom heav'n has blest'd 80
 With all that's beauteous, and with all that's best—

Can thy pure bosom be condemn'd to know
 The pangs! the wretchedness of wedded woe.
 Still in domestic happiness approv'd,
 By all who know thee, honour'd and lov'd! 85
 Live to those tender ties, that sage decree
 Which heav'n has made, nor lose one thought on me.
 Ah think not—spotless as thou art, and pure—
 On one, whose illness death can only cure!
 Far from thee sped, let all remembrance cease, 90
 And leave me wretched, to secure thy peace.

Heav'ns! with what quick transition do I move
 From friendship's limits to unbounded love!
 Soon from my heart the curtain drops away,
 And every feeling rushes into day. 95
 'O state of inward misery complete,
 Where fruitless wishes and repentance meet.
 When heav'n just op'ning to my soul appears,
 And soft forgiveness glimmers thro' my tears :

When

When kind contrition wears out every crime, 100
And mercy marks me on the leaf of time;
From rapt'rous extacy thy beauties tear
Each soaring thought, and burst on every pray'r;
That lov'd idea every scene dispels,
And all my bosom into tumult swells.
Earth and my LAURA, more inviting seem 105
Than heav'n, tho' pictur'd by the bigot's dream:
What are it's mansions of eternal light,
Seraphic sounds, or raptures of delight!
What is the boasted plenitude of joy, 110
Pleasures for ever new that cannot cloy!
If in the bright immeasurable round,
I sigh for joys where only thou art found.
How vain! how joyless is that heav'n to me,
Whose only pleasures are to gaze on thee! 115
One look of kindness, such as those soft eyes
With pity shed on sorrow's mournful sighs:
One tender sound, that shames the list'ning spheres,—
And which thy PETRARCH still in absence hears!—

To this sad bosom, more divinely feels, 120
 Than all the raptures Piety reveals.

How oft, attemp'ring by discretion's frown
 The smiles of peace, I fondly thought my own,
 Hast thou, when sick'ning with my pain I sigh'd,
 By one kind look the stream of sorrow dried! 125
 Pierc'd to my inmost sense, and made me know
 The wide extremes of happiness and woe.
 For ah! no sooner was the gentle fire
 Of slumb'ring passion, waken'd by desire ;
 Scarce had my heart the gloom of comfort caught, 130
 And slowly brighten'd thro' the gloom of thought
 Than you, no stranger to the human breast,
 With stern severity my looks repress'd.
 How could'st thou cruel! from thy PETRARCH take
 The pledge he coveted for LAURA's sake! 135
 Was then thy glove* too much for years of pain ?
 Was virtue kept more spotless by disdain ?

* Laura happening to drop her glove at a public assembly, Petrarch wished to keep it, but was harshly repulsed.

Back to my wonted wretchedness I move,
And pity those whom heav'n has doom'd to love;
Pensive from thee to melancholy turn, 140
While anguish murmurs, as I inly mourn :
' Sit in severest judgment on my fate,
' Thy blame may reach me, but thou can'st not hate.

How often, visited by gleams of peace,
When study sooth'd me with imperfect ease, 145
Lost in some learned business of the brain,
Has fancy led me from my bosom's pain;
Kindly delusive, charm'd me to repose,
And lull'd to rest the tumult of my woes.
Big with each little plan ambition frames, 150
The glare of titles and the noise of names!
I've trod the flipp'ry paths of gay renown,
And fame has call'd me to the laurell'd crown.
Heav'n knows how careless of each honour paid, 155
My bosom sicken'd at the gay parade;

D

When

When princes crouded in my envied train,
 And monarchs yielded to the muse's reign ;
 Still on each scene thy lov'd idea stole,—
 Still did I feel thee wanting to the whole.
 In vain the laurel, with encircling bough, 160
 Twines it's triumphant honours round my brow,
 Or Rome re'echoes to my boasted name : *
 If LAURA's absent, what is PETRARCH's fame ?
 How lost ; how fruitless are it's charms to me, 165
 Whose only comfort is to gaze on thee.

Call me—whichever sooths my LAURA's breast—
 Thy lord's acquaintance and his studious guest :
 Call me thy bard, instructor or thy friend ;
 All in one softer character must end.
 Thus for a time, the boist'rous tempests cease, 170
 And leave the skies in momentary peace ;

* Petrarch was publicly crowned in the capitol at Rome.

A death like stillness to the storm succeeds,
And scarce a murmur's whisper'd thro' the reeds:
'Till, with redoubled violence, it shakes
The bending pines, and all its fury wakes. 175
Aw'd by no ties, and stranger to controul,
I feel the tyrant trespass on my soul;
Soon does each kind illusion melt away,
And ev'ry feeling's conscious of his sway.
Rapt into scenes, that never must be mine, 180
Heart-piercing thought!—and never can be thine!
I yield unbounded to my sleepless ill,
And add to passion, all the pow'r of will.
' Is there no law'—exhausted with its woe,
Exclaims my heart, while streams of sorrow flow, 185
And bounteous nature from my wither'd brain,
Lends a kind drop to cool its burning pain;—
' Is there no law, which pitying heav'n allows
' To lovers, conscious of each others vows?
' In wedded bondage, must the bosom pine, 190
' And custom keep, what nature would resign?

O curs'd seduction of each virtuous sense,
 When fancy, flatter'd by the dear offence,
 Dwells on each charm, in spite of every tie,
 'Till fiction gives, what heaven and you deny! 200

Sooth'd into rest, my heavy eye-lids close,
 And fancied joys succeed to real woes.

§ Then do I clasp thee, trembling in my arms,
 Shook by tumultuous raptures and alarms;
 Yielding to bliss, my beauteous Laura lies, 205

With beating bosom and expiring eyes.

Love on all sides, his purple pinion shakes,
 Fans the soft flame and every feeling wakes;
 While urg'd by all, that fancy can be blest'd,
 With keen delight I snatch thee to my breast. 210

A thrilling transport shoots in every vein,
 And madd'ning passion throws the willing rein.
 Inspir'd by raptures, that can never cloy,
 And lost in mutual agonies of joy,

§ I have borrowed these lines from a fragment written by myself two years ago.
 All the other parts of the poem have been compleated in six successive mornings.

Trembling I wander, o'er thy angel frame, 215
And hear, and see thee, look and sigh the same.
Lip seal'd to lip, and murm'ring breath to breath,*
Entranc'd we sink in momentary death.
'Till wasted nature, vanquish'd by the strife,
Throbs in each vein, and grasps returning life; 220
Then from the dear extatic pleasure springs,
And sighs! and looks unutterable things.

Ah! tell me Laura—long inur'd to weep,
When captive grief has lost it's tears in sleep,
Springs not the soul on fancy's airy plume, 225
Beyond the narrow precincts of the tomb?
While peace invites her to that bourn at last,
Where joy commences, and each sorrow's past?
Ah tell me too, when conscious of the cheat,
Awaken'd reason finds it all deceit,

* Although Petrarch's passion, which was certainly somewhat stronger than platonic affection, frequently led him into the wildest excesses, yet his secession from virtue was never of long duration.

Is not the wretch to more than madness fir'd, 230
Each pain redoubled and each bliss desir'd ?
Too well this heart, the bitter truth avows,
When conscience tears me from its guilty vows:
And heav'n, or chance, the treach'rous dream
destroys, 235
While virtue shudders at illicit joys.
Wretch that I am, to taint thy spotless ear,
With guilty sounds which honour should not hear:
More wretched still, to bid thy breast afford
One rebel wish, that tears thee from thy lord. 240
Is this the vaunted purity I draw
From beauty, led by virtue's purest law ?
Are these the precepts so divinely taught
By those chaste eyes, and innocence of thought ?

Sad fatal morn, on which devotion drew .245
My early steps, and heav'n invited you ;
When echoing matins fill'd the sacred dome,
And rapture mingled with a world to come.

O time for ever dear, tho' mark'd by woe,
Afflictive source of every grief I know! 250
Then, void of care, on active wing I sprung,
Lov'd by the old, and honour'd by the young;
Warm'd by those hopes, which gay ambition feeds,
And spurr'd by nature to the noblest deeds,
While partial Phœbus touch'd my chosen lyre 255
With more than common elegance and fire,
Thy PETRARCH then—how lost! how wretched now!—
Stepp'd into life with pleasure's chearful brow.
Smooth and unfullied every moment ran,
Each day beginning as the last began: 260
Without a care or sorrow, to destroy
The flatt'ring tenor of unfading joy.
New pleasure's rose, at every step I took:
What comfort vanish'd in one fatal look!

From one soft glance of those seducing eyes, 265
What hopes have yielded to continued sighs!

Mark'd is that brow, where once no trace was known,
My looks are languid and my vigour's gone ;
On ev'ry feature sad affliction's seen,
And melancholy shades my pensive mien. 270

In vain to books and solitude I fly,
Or search thro' nature with enquiring eye ;
In ev'ry flow'r, that heav'nly bloom I see,
At ev'ry line, my wishes spring to thee.

Read what I please, remembrance, still I find, 275
Breathes in each page, and holds thee to my mind.

Oh why—too gentle for the tyrant's part—
Since heav'n has made thee mistress of my heart ;
Why should'st thou wave the rod of hard controul,
And raise such tumults in my vanquish'd soul ! 280

Let kindness cheer me, and I'll hug my chains,
Nor wish for liberty while Laura reigns :

In ev'ry pulse thy soft dominion own,
Each sense thy subject, and my heart thy throne.

Vain hopes ! whose falsehoods ev'ry prospect shade, 285
For Laura flights the conquest she has made.

Close

Cloſe to Vaoclufe,* and neighb'ring on my cot,
Romantic nature ſpreads a friendly grot.
Beyond the reach of tumult's buſtling crew,
By rocks o'erhung, and perilous to view ; 290
Dark as my ſoul, the diſmal hollow lies,
Disjoyn'd from earth, and ſtranger to the ſkies ;
For not a ray can pierce the gloomy round :
There echo reſts, nor wakes to human ſound.
The whiſtling winds, that tear the ſkirted ſky, 295
Here loſe their rage and into murmurs die ;
While Sorgia's rills in trickling horror creep,
And kindly prompt my aking eyes to weep.
Down my wan cheek the tear of anguiſh flows,
And lends a mournful reſpite to my woes. 300
There may'ſt thou view, what havoc charms, like thine,
Inceſſant make, and add one ſigh to mine :

* Vaoclufe is a delightful romantic ſpot, ſituate in the neighbourhood of Avignon, and facing the Mediterranean. It is ſurrounded on all ſides by a ſtupendous chain of rocks in the form of a horſe-ſhoe. At the foot of one of theſe enormous Cliffs, you behold a prodigious cavern hollowed by the hand of nature. A fountain riſes in the middle, and forms the river Sorgia.

Nor could'st thou, callous to the tend'rest flame,
See pain and sickness waste a lover's frame,
And not relieve the tortures of despair, 305
By one kind look—perhaps by one soft tear.
There, in successive agonies, I prove
Reflection's horrors, and the pangs of love.
Vain is each hope, foreboding reason cries;
Vain are thy tears and more than human sighs. 310
Rous'd by distress, I soar to op'ning heav'n,
Plead for each crime, and find each crime forgiv'n:
Conviction beams, and arm'd in ev'ry part,
I rise to tear thee from my struggling heart.
Deluded wretch! no sooner am I spread, 315
Worn down by thought, on mournful sorrow's bed;
Scarce are my senses lull'd to broken rest,
And thy lov'd image wav'ring from my breast,
Than, with resistless magic o'er the whole,
Thy beauty streams, and fascinates my soul. 320
In that kind hour, when all, save Petrarch, know
A calm suspense from wretchedness and woe;

Thrice have I known thee pierce the night's still reign ;
Thrice have I heard thee claim thy slave again.

A conscious tremor every sense disarms, 325

I hear ! I see thee burst in all thy charms.

Rob'd as thou wert on that ill-fated day,

When ev'ry wish was yielded to thy sway,

With stedfast look and dignity divine,

On ev'ry side I feel, I see thee shine. 330

' Turn—did'st thou say—ungrateful wretch ! and see

' The slighted friend, whose cares are all for thee.

' Ingrate ! unkind ! thy Laura to disown,

' Because her breast is purer than thy own.

' Is there no realm, beyond this mortal spot,* 335

' Where lovers meet, and ev'ry pain's forgot ?

Heav'ns !

* I have extracted this note from the memoirs to which I am so much obliged.
' Petrarch retired to this delightful spot, to cure himself of his passion, and indulge
' his taste for letters ; but in vain.'—(The author means Vaucluse.)

' I may hide myself,' says he, ' among the rocks and in the woods, but there are
' no places so wild or solitary whither the torments of love do not pursue me.

' Thrice in that dark and lonely hour when nought but ghastly shades is seen or
' heard, Laura, with stedfast look, approached my bed and claimed her slave. My
' limbs

Heav'ns! with what inward anguish did I start,
 What searching chillness shook my troubled heart,
 'Till, cold as marble or the ling'ring breath
 That feebly flutters on the lip of death, 340
 Congeal'd I lay, tumultuous terror o'er,
 Gaz'd on thy face and throb'd at ev'ry pore.
 Guilt stalks around, and stings my tortur'd ear,
 While conscience adds to ev'ry sound I hear;
 Led by despair, and heedless of my doom, 345
 Restless I rise, and pierce the midnight gloom;
 Up the steep rock with madd'ning anguish fly,
 Wrapp'd in the thickest horrors of the sky;
 Along the ridge, aghast and sad, I move,
 Or try to shun thee in the deepest grove. 350

' limbs were froze with fear; my blood fled from my veins, and rushed upon my
 ' heart. Trembling I rose e're morn; and left a house where all I saw alarmed
 ' me. I climbed the rocks; I ran into the woods; watching with fearful eyes this
 ' dreadful vision: I may not be believed, but still it followed;—here I perceived it
 ' starting from a tree—there rising from a fountain—now it descended from the
 ' rocks, or floated on the clouds. Surrounded thus, I stood transfixed with hor-
 ' ror!' This description alone is sufficient to vindicate my opinion of Petrarch's
 passion.

How vain each struggling effort of my breast!
On ev'ry scene thy image stands impress'd,
I hear! I see thee, spite of rocks and trees,
Float on the cloud, and whisper in the breeze,
Beam from the brownest shadows of the wood, 355
Shake in each branch, and murmur in each flood.

Loft in some awful solitary shade,
A thousand fears oppress the timid maid.
On ev'ry wind some gliding spectre moves,
Or ruffian issues from the neighb'ring groves; — 360
Tremb'ling she treads, and starts at ev'ry sound,
When gath'ring darkness veils the meadows round.
Forward each look's solicitously cast,
Nor dares reflection venture on the past.
Transfix'd, she stops at ev'ry lane to come, 365
Then darts, in fear'd precipitancy, home.
There end her fears, contentment beams anew,
And gladness springs from ev'ry pain she knew.

Not

Not so thy PETRARCH; torn on ev'ry side,
By fruitless hopes of comfort still denied; 370
At ev'ry step, surrounding sorrows flow,
Recall the past, and wake some future woe.
Pensive I move to all I left behind,
With aching bosom and a wasted mind.
Complaints succeed to melancholy grief, 375
I call thee barb'rous, and I feel relief.
Alas! how weak! how transient does it prove!
One thought subdues me to the gentlest love.
For ah!—though rapid as the ray, that flies
In awful tumult o'er the darken'd skies— 380
Delusion brightens on my clouded heart,
And flatt'ring sighs—'thy LAURA shares a part!'
Back on my soul each giddy transport turns
I think thee gentle and my bosom burns.
Again I view thee in thy blaze of charms, 385
My senses madden, and my soul's in arms.
'Tis then—for fiction ne'er can paint it so—
Our wishes meet and both united glow.

Ah! does remembrance wake the tender sigh,
Spring from thy breast and prompt thy gazing eye : 390
If, in that hour, when sorrow loves to muse,
A soft idea wanders to Vacluse?
Does one kind wish, congenial to my own,
Steal from the sick'ning grandeur of the town,
And sweetly beam on this deserted spot, 395
While all, but love and PETRARCH, is forgot?
Ah do'st thou LAURA, echoing sighs to mine,
Feel in each sense that PETRARCH should be thine?
Recall thy vows, in wish'd for freedom move,
And mix with marriage all the sweets of love? 400
Seducing dream! once more to madness wrought,
My hungry senses snatch the pleasing thought:
Once more I leave my solitary bow'rs,
And see thee beckon from Avignon's tow'rs; 405
With hasty step and keen aspiring eye,
Quick to those fatal well-known walls I fly:
Talk to each gale, and in each murmur hear
A sigh, that calls me to thy partial ear.

So the deserted bird, whose mates are flown, 410

Floats in the void of elements unknown:

While angry waves in tumult roar below,

And boist'rous winds from ev'ry quarter blow ;

At last he sees a friendly sail appear,

And drops, unconscious of a danger there.* 415

How beats my heart, what varying passions rise,

That fondly cheat me into future fighs,

When near the spot, where all my wishes rest,

With flutt'ring pulse, quick step and throbbing breast !

Madd'ning I tread, till all united meet, 420

And transport throws me trembling at thy feet.

Chain'd to those knees, in vain you cry—forbear !

Dim are my eyes and deaf my love-sick ear ;

* The following account which Petrarch gives of himself and of Laura's behaviour will easily prove the agitated state of his mind:—' As soon as I appear, you
' turn your eyes away; you recline your head; and your countenance is troubled.
' *Alas! I perceive you suffer.* O Laura, why these cruel manners. Could you
' tear yourself from a heart where you have taken such deep root, I should com-
' mend your severity, in a barren and uncultivated soil, the plant that languishes
' requires a kinder sun; but you must for ever live in my heart. Since then it is
' your destiny, render your situation less disagreeable.'

With quiv'ring lip, from hand to hand I rove,
And sighs proclaim how much, how well I love. 425

O precious interval, when silence shews

The mutual tenderness, that inly glows!

Touch'd by those sighs, my anguish and my tears,

Compassion melts to ev'ry sound she hears:

Nor can'st thou burst from PETRARCH's longing
arms, 430

'Till spotless virtue fills thee with alarms.

Still on my ear the pious accents dwell,

Which heav'n inspired and eloquently fell

From those dear lips, when to thyself restor'd,

Discretion spoke, and PETRARCH blest'd each word. 435

' I am not, said'st thou tremulously faint,

' The wretch you think me and your passions paint.

' If PETRARCH loves, ah! let his flame aspire

' Beyond low-thoughted passion and desire.

' Free from each earthborn particle of clay, 440

' The virtuous love in heav'n's eternal day.

' In humble hope, then let us jointly rise
 ' From lawless wishes, and repentant sighs.
 ' Yet O forbear, to make this bosom feel
 ' One wish, that innocence dares not reveal. 445

Abash'd I rise, and startling at the view
 Of conscious guilt, just catch a last adieu:
 Back to Vacluse my wretched footsteps bear,
 And turn, alternately, to love and pray'r.
 Fix'd on the dear resemblance of that face*— 450
 Those eyes, sweet mansions of each soft'ning grace!
 Lips that can shame the rose bud in its prime,
 And forehead, whiter than the lock of Time!—
 Convuls'd I stand, 'till touch'd by heav'n and you,
 Each sense is quell'd, and virtue blooms anew. 455

Embow'ring shades! ye rocks and murm'ring floods!
 Sequestered vales and solitary woods!

* Petrarch had a small picture of Laura, which was drawn by one Simon Martin, a pupil of Giotto, who was patronized by Benedict XII. ' She appears, according to a copy yet at Avignon, (say the Memoirs) dressed in red, holding a flower in her hand, with a sweet and modest countenance, rather inclined to tenderness.'

Scenes where my soul, subdu'd by love and grief,
 In every black idea found relief:
 And thou sad cave, receptacle of sighs, 460
 Whose mournful echoes oft have borne my cries!
 To ev'ry shade it's stillness I restore,
 And lose in piety the woes I bore.

Yet thou, my guardian, advocate and friend!
 Still on my steps with gentlest care attend; 465
 Lead to those realms, where free from earth's alarms,
 New-born and spotless in celestial charms—
 We both may rise, still loving and lov'd,
 From all the miseries each other prov'd.
 And if—for heav'n all conscious of thy worth— 470
 Will cease to want thee for ungrateful Earth—
 If thou, my LAURA—spotless as thou art,
 An angel's figure and an angel's heart!—
 By virtue wafted, should'st in triumph rise,
 And leave thy PETRARCH exil'd to his sighs, 475

Let, in thy gen'rous pleading for us all,
On me one look of separate pity fall :
And oh remember ! that it once was thine,
To raise my wishes, and my thoughts refine :
To point, where saints in trembling hope have trod, 480
And trust, like you, my Saviour and my GOD.

T H E E N D.

C O N C L U S I O N.

I cannot take leave of my indulgent reader without first satisfying a curiosity, which I should myself experience on a like occasion: It is, however, with the utmost deference to inquisitive knowledge. Neither can it prove superfluous to trespass upon the Public by extracting from Petrarch's memoirs a brief account of Laura's death.

‘ In the year 1348, about the month of January, a dreadful
‘ plague broke out at Avignon, which shewed itself by a continual
‘ fever, with spitting of blood; and those whom it seized died ge-
‘ nerally on, or at the end of the third day. It was most violent
‘ in Lent; so that in the three days which preceded the fourth
‘ Sunday in Lent, there died at Avignon fourteen hundred per-
‘ sons; and if we may believe an historian of that time, this ca-
‘ lamity carried off in that city only, in the space of three months,
‘ a hundred and twenty thousand souls. Laura felt the first at-
‘ tacks of it, the 3d of April: she had the fever with spitting of
‘ blood. As she was persuaded she could not live above the third
‘ day, she took the methods her piety and reason suggested to be
‘ immediately necessary. Laura seated on her bed, appeared quite
‘ tranquil, no hideous and threatening phantoms had power over
‘ her divine soul. Her companions who stood round her, wept and
‘ sobbed

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‘ sobbed aloud. It is a singular circumstance, observes the writer
‘ of these memoirs, that so beautiful a person should be so beloved
‘ by her own sex. Nothing can be of a higher eulogy on her
‘ character. Her soul departed gently without a struggle. She
‘ had the air of a weary person who slumbers, and death had pe-
‘ netrated through all her veins, without disturbing the serenity
‘ of her countenance. She died about six in the morning on
‘ the 6th of April, 1348. The body of Laura was found in the
‘ chapel de la Croix, with an Italian sonnet of Petrarch’s in the
‘ year 1533; and it was then proved that the Laura of Petrarch,
‘ which some took it into their heads to doubt, was the same
‘ with Laura de Noves, wife of Hugues de Sade. Petrarch adds,
‘ Laura, illustrated by her own virtues, and long celebrated in
‘ my verses, appeared to my eyes for the first time the sixth of
‘ April, 1327, at Avignon in the church of St. Claire, at the
‘ first hour of the day: I was then in my youth. In the same
‘ city, on the same day, and at the same hour, in the year 1348,
‘ this luminary disappeared from our world. I was then at
‘ Verona, ignorant of my wretched situation.’

It should not, however, be forgotten, that before Petrarch’s acquaintance with Laura, he had been particularly attached to another woman; the issue of which connexion was a son, who afterwards proved to our unfortunate lover a source of affliction. In this he shared the fate of his beloved Laura, who was doomed to see the tenderest care thrown away upon a dissolute son and daughter.

C O N C L U S I O N.

‘ With respect to Petrarch, after having led the life of a wanderer, to whom the sweets of a kind and chearful home are unknown and unhopd for, to alleviate the toils of life, and the distresses of humanity ; he finally departed this life at Venice. He had long been afflicted by a fever which undermined him very sensibly ; and languished through a tedious disorder, expiring by inches. He was found dead in his library, July 18, 1374, with one arm leaning on a book. His tender and ardent passion for Laura had entirely unsettled him for twenty years, and produced a restlessness in his mind (not formed perhaps by nature in the calmest mould) through every succeeding period of life. From youth to manhood he was a prey to the keenest sensibility : from manhood to old age he was struggling to recover a calm and virtuous state of soul.’

МОСКОВСКО

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